

# State of New Hampshire

JOHN J. BARTHELMES  
COMMISSIONER OF SAFETY



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## DEPARTMENT OF SAFETY NEWS RELEASE

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### **FATAL CRASHES UP; COMMISSIONER URGES CARE IN HOLIDAY DRIVING**

**CONCORD, N.H.** - New Hampshire's highway death toll is up significantly this year, and with the summer season on the wane, Labor Day weekend approaching and children heading back to school, drivers need to use extra caution on our streets and highways, Commissioner of Safety John J. Barthelmes said Monday.

The State's highway death toll thus far, at 87, is up by 26 percent from the same period last year when 61 people died on New Hampshire highways. The number of fatal crashes also increased, by 31 percent, from 61 to 80 for the period January 1 through August 19.

Of the 87 victims, 44 were vehicle drivers, six were adult occupants, and six child occupants were killed, as well as four adult and two child pedestrians, 21 motorcycle operators, one child motorcycle passenger, one snowmobile operator and two adult bicyclists.

According to the Commissioner, the fact that 24 percent of the victims were motorcycle operators or passengers is alarming, considering the relatively small number of registered motorcycles vs. all other types of vehicles.

"Motorcycle fatalities are way out of proportion to the number of motorcycles on the road," the Commissioner said. "Motorcycle deaths have more than doubled compared with last year."

Fatalities involving heavy commercial vehicles have also seen a substantial increase, from three last year at this time to 10 this year. In only one of these cases was the commercial driver killed.

"When a passenger car or pickup truck collides with a heavy commercial vehicle the odds of survival for the occupants of the car are poor", the Commissioner noted, and urged motorists to be careful when driving close to commercial vehicles. "If you follow a truck too closely, the driver cannot see you in the vehicle's side mirrors."

The majority of operators killed were adults, not elderly or youthful operators as some people think. Of the 44 vehicle operators who were killed, only three were under the age of 18 and three were 71 years old or older.

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The total number of crashes of all types increased from 13,091 last year at this time to 16,862, a 28 percent increase. Injuries also increased by 28 percent, from 5,158 to 6,644. Four out of every 10 crashes this year have involved injury to at least one person. Only Grafton and Sullivan Counties have seen a reduction in the number of fatal crashes this year; the other eight counties have seen increases.

“It is tragic to see the number of crashes where the simple wearing of a safety belt might have saved a life. This is particularly true in rollover incidents where unbelted occupants are almost always ejected from the vehicle,” Commissioner Barthelmes said.

He added that changing traffic patterns with the holiday and children returning to school increase the danger for drivers and pedestrians.